



JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

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Vol. VII, No. 3

July, 1947

On the Use of 18th Century Newspapers

A recent British review of an American scholarly work contained the comment: "It is observable in this careful study, as in so many others, that the investigation generally stops short of the daily and almost-daily newspapers of the subject's period."

Unfortunately this same weakness has been fairly general in books published on our side of the Atlantic, and in many on the other side, too. Again and again volumes have appeared, admirable in many ways, but sadly deficient because the authors have not consulted the daily papers, in addition to the better known monthly magazines. The excuse usually given is that the only complete collection of 18th century English newspapers in in the British Museum — the famous Burney Collection. Not many graduate students, or beginning instructors, have the money to go all the way to London merely to read the ephemeral journalism of another century. The result has been that many directors of research have advised students to ignore the daily papers and to consult only the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *Monthly Review*, and the other periodicals readily accessible in bound volumes.

But this is a specious point of view. The monthly journals do not contain anywhere near the whole story. The daily papers often have additional information of the utmost value, and it is important continually to stress that fact. There are the priceless columns of book advertisements, from which we can secure the approximate publication date of almost every book (No more ought anyone write blandly that "such and such" was published sometime in 1756). The advertisements also give us data about the prices, the contents of books, the titles of rare pamphlets sometimes written in answer to more famous publica-

tions. Even in business papers such as the *Daily Advertiser* there are often extremely interesting letters of comment on literary productions. And in the gossip columns may be found hints and clues leading to important biographical and bibliographical discoveries. These are only a few examples of the wealth of material to be found in the daily papers.

You answer — Why stress all this when financial considerations still stand in the way of most young scholars' getting to England? But it is no longer necessary to travel to the British Museum in order to read widely in the old London newspapers. Every year more and more copies, more and more long runs of important papers, are being made available in this country, either the original issues or films. Let us cite one example. The Library of Congress has an almost complete file of the *London Daily Advertiser* from 1731 through 1795. From a negative of this complete run, Yale University has secured a positive film — clear, sharp in definition, and easy to read. In the near future Columbia University and Chicago University plan to secure additional positive films of this newspaper. Thus for those who can get to Washington, New Haven, New York, or Chicago the daily issues of the *Daily Advertiser* for most of the 18th century will be easily available.

With the most modern microfilm machines, moreover, it is no longer exasperating, disastrous to the eyes, and time consuming to use a film of a daily newspaper. Your editor can bear witness that skimming through week after week of the paper, merely by turning the crank of the reading machine, is in some ways easier and speedier than turning the pages of the original issues.

More cannot be said at this time of the long runs of other London newspapers now open to American students. (In future issues we hope to list them.) Instead, we should like to make a few suggestions.

First, we need badly a revision of the Crane and Kaye, *Census* (1927). Some of you may remember that in two of the earliest numbers of the *JNL*, March and May 1941 (look them up if you have a complete file), there was a discussion of this problem by A. D. McKillop and R. S. Crane. The war stopped all plans, but now let us hope some action can be taken. The new census should include films, and should attempt to give as precise an inventory of library holdings as possible.

Next we need more filming of long runs of newspapers in the

Burney Collection. Deposited at the Library of Congress by the M.L.A. is a film of the *London Evening Post* from Dec. 12, 1727 to Dec. 30, 1738. But much more ought to be photographed. Ideally, films of long runs of the *London Chronicle*, the *Public Advertiser*, the *St. James's Chronicle*, the *Morning Post*, the *Morning Herald*, to name only a few, should be made in triplicate, so that one copy could be in the East, another in the mid-West, and the third on the Pacific Coast. If libraries in these sections pooled resources, something might be accomplished.

All this will take time. In the meantime there is something else we can do — advertise widely what papers now are available in this country. Here the *JNL* can help. Merely as a temporary measure, let us list in these pages the major items. Long, complete runs are what are important. Scanty, desultory files are often maddening and more trouble than they are worth, for the scholar often does not know what he is looking for, and wishes merely to skim. What we need are more tools like the film of the *Daily Advertiser*.

Take it upon yourself to check your own library, to see what it has. Send on listings for inclusion in the next *JNL*. Let us make certain that never again will an American scholar explain the vagueness and gaps in his research by the excuse that he could not get to England to consult the Burney Collection.

Johnson's Last Hours

Through the courtesy of Cuthbert B. Pigot (Wood Rising, Boxford, Suffolk) we are able to give for the first time a description of Johnson's last hours, contained in a letter from William Weller Pepys to Hannah More. Pepys wrote from Wimpole Street on December 17, 1784:

....

You came I fancy too late to see poor Johnson whose abilities and Goodness I much respected tho' I could not prevail upon myself to receive much pleasure from his Company.

It was a real satisfaction to me to hear Sir Joshua say last night that from the time all hope of living was removed he lost the apprehension of dying, which before had been very great, and talked of his exit and Funeral with the utmost composure: You know perhaps that he has left the Residue of his Fortune to his Black Servant, and I was not a little surprised to hear that it

would amount to six hundred pounds, the whole of his fortune not being much less than Two thousand,

His manner of dying was the most enviable in the world for he fell into a sound sleep on the Monday morning from which he never awak'd, tho' he did not expire till the evening of that day. He is to be buried on Monday in Westminster Abbey.

You whose writings have been so justly distinguish'd for that spirit of Virtue & Religion with which they are animated will be glad to hear on more accounts than one that Johnson received the greatest consolation in his last moments from the consciousness of never having written anything inimical to Religion or Morality—a consolation which I wish'd him to have enjoyed much sooner than he did as it would have overcome that undue apprehension of death with which I am told he was till late very greatly oppressed. Perhaps you know all these circumstances already but as it is a general complaint that the supposition of one's knowing everything is the cause of one's hearing nothing, I would not for that reason forbear to tell you what I know upon a subject so interesting to us all....

As Maury Quinlan points out, this must be the letter referred to in Hannah's letter to her sister early in 1785 (*Memoirs*, I, 392; *John. Misc.*, II, 205-6). But she obviously had other sources of information, and more dramatic ones. The whole problem of Johnson's increase of religious fervor in his last hours is an interesting one, and Quinlan is discussing the whole matter in detail in an article to appear next spring in the *Journal of Religion*.

Work in Progress

Note: Be sure to send in any new projects you may have started.

General

HOUSTON, Percy H. (*Occidental*). *Patterns of Eighteenth Century Thought*. A book discussing Dryden, Pope, Swift, Johnson and Burke as representative figures, and giving a fairly exhaustive treatment of the sentimental movement. Nearly completed.

Prior, Matthew

SPEARS, Monroe K. (Vanderbilt). *Some Ethical Aspects of Matthew Prior's Poetry*.

————— *Matthew Prior's Religion*.

Matthew Prior: Poetic 'Truth' and the Quality of
Light Verse.

Steele, Sir Richard

LOFTIS, John (Princeton). *Richard Steele, Man of the Theatre: His Career as Playwright, Dramatic Critic, and Governor of Drury Lane.* Well under way.

A Johnson Revision

Fritz Liebert (Yale) sends in the following which we believe has not been noted before:

"The revision of Johnson's celebrated sarcasm on Grenville in *Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands* has long been known. Johnson originally wrote of this plodding minister, with regard to the Manilla ransom, 'He had powers not universally possessed: if he could have got the money, he could have counted it.' In all but a few copies of the pamphlet, however, the page carrying this sentence was removed, and a cancel substituted, reading, 'He had powers not universally possessed: and if he sometimes erred, he was likewise sometimes right.'

"No Johnsonian could read this flat revision without wondering how Johnson could ever have written thus. The answer is that he almost certainly did not write the revision. Boswell indicates this in a footnote in which he speaks of the change as an example of 'ministerial authourship.' An anonymous correspondent of the *Public Advertiser* for 2 April 1771 is more explicit: 'Scarce were a few copies got abroad, before the sale of the edition, which had been advertised, was stopped, by order of the ministry, for the sake of an alteration, which was made (as there is reason to believe) without the consent of the Doctor being asked or had....'

"But the most convincing proof lies in the subsequent fate of the sentence. Powell says in a note that 'a second change seems to have been made,' and cites the text of the 1787 *Works*. Actually the second change was made by Johnson himself when he collected his pamphlets in the single volume of *Political Tracts* in 1776. There are at least five alterations in the text of *Falkland's Islands* as printed in the 1776 volume which must have been made by Johnson. Not the longest but the most significant concerns the cancelled sentence on Grenville. Unable to abide the insipidity of the ministerial author, Johnson in 1776 dropped

the words 'He had powers not universally possessed' and revised the remainder to read 'If he was sometimes wrong, he was often in the right.' Even thus, it is hardly Johnson's most brilliant sentence; the facts however do serve to spare him from concurrence in the meaningless change introduced by the ministry, which he mended as soon as he was able."

The Portable Johnson and Boswell

In the Viking series of "portable" volumes we now have one devoted to Johnson and his biographer, edited by Louis Kronenberger. Since your editor has elsewhere in a newspaper review commented in detail on the make-up of the volume, there is little need for repetition here. The choice of Johnson's works is certain to bring a storm of protest in some quarters. Nothing from *Rasselas*, or from the *Rambler* or *Idler*! Very little, indeed, of Johnson the moralist! The editor evidently thinks that Johnson the biographer and critic will most appeal to 20th century readers; and perhaps he is right. It would be an interesting experiment, however, to prepare for the present-day general reader a selection of what the 18th century thought to be Johnson's best. An interesting experiment, but possibly costly to the venturesome publisher. We wonder.

With true Johnsonian vigor, Kronenberger in his Preface tells just what he likes and dislikes. And no matter how much you may disagree, we are sure you will enjoy his frank and entertaining commentary.

A Few New Books

Cleanth Brooks, in his *The Well Wrought Urn*, has chapters referring to Pope, Gray, Relativity in Criticism, etc., which should interest most of our readers.

Two recent books on Blake might be mentioned — Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* and W. P. Wicutt's *Blake - a Psychological Study*.

Others which you may not have seen listed are D. M. Foerster's *Homer in English Criticism: the Historical Approach in the Eighteenth Century*; André de Mandach's *Moliere et la Comedie de Moeurs en Angleterre 1660-68* (Neuchatel, 1946).

Villainy Detected

A new anthology of 18th century crime, entitled *Villainy Detected*, is to be published early in September by Appleton-Century. It is edited by Lillian de la Torre, author of *Elizabeth Is Missing* and *Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector*. Included among the many tales of picturesque scoundrels and highwaymen is what the editor calls the "first tale of detection ever published in England" — *A Faithful Narrative ... of Thief Takers, alias Thief-makers* by Joseph Cox, 1756. There are other accounts (some retold by modern writers) of the Campden mystery, the exploits of Jack Sheppard, Richardson the pirate, the Douglas peerage case, and of course, Elizabeth Canning, to mention only a few. The list of authors ranges from Defoe and Scott to Andrew Lang, Raymond Postgate and Edmund Pearson.

Some Recent Articles

A few articles in periodicals which you may not ordinarily see are: John Butt's recent address, "Science and Man in Eighteenth Century Poetry" (inaugural lecture as Joseph Cowen Professor of English Language and Literature at King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne) in the *Durham University Journal* for June 1947; R. C. Boys' "The Architect Vanbrugh and the Wits," (containing illustrations of the "Goose-Pye" house and of Blenheim), *College Art Journal*, Summer 1947; and H. Teerink's "Swift's Ordination," in *The Dublin Magazine*, April-June, 1947.

Other recent discussions which may be listed are: Thomas B. Stroup's "Gay's *Mohocks* and Milton," *JEGP*, April 1947; Alice S. Brandenburg's "English Education and Neo-classical Taste in the Eighteenth Century," *MLQ*, June 1947; Curt A. Zimansky's "Chaucer and the School of Provence: a Problem in Eighteenth Century Literary History," *PQ*, Oct. 1946; Eva Maria Neumeyer's "The Landscape Garden as a Symbol in Rousseau, Goethe and Flaubert," *Journal Hist. of Ideas*, April 1947.

Lord David Cecil's "The Poetry of Thomas Gray," *Yale Review*, Summer, 1947, is the substance of his recent Warton Lecture.

A ten-page abstract of Edward A. Bloom's dissertation "Samuel Johnson as Journalist" has been issued by the University of Illinois, dated 1947.

Miscellaneous News Items

It might be useful here to list a few recent changes of address. Ernest Mossner is moving from Syracuse to the Univ. of Texas; Cleanth Brooks from L.S.U. to Yale; W. R. Irwin from Cornell to the Univ. of Iowa; Walter M. Crittenden from the Navy to the Univ. of S. California; Brice Harris from Illinois to Penn State.

Edward Hooker writes that the *ARS* pictorial supplement, mentioned in our last number, may be delayed until early in 1948.

The English Dept. at U.C.L.A. has been given the Blanchard Collection, a fine library of about 10,000 volumes, almost entirely in the 18th century. This, together with the Clark Library, and the Huntington near by, will make U.C.L.A. a Mecca for all of us. California here we come!

Bill Templeman sends word of the visit of Nichol Smith to Los Angeles, where he lectured twice at the Athenaeum and once at the Univ. of S. California. A testimonial dinner was arranged for May 7th, under the leadership of Lionel Stevenson and Garland Greever. Fifty-nine attended, including faculty members from Scripps, Occidental, Cal. Tech., Whittier, U.C.L.A., U.S.C., etc. According to Templeman, Dr. Johnson appeared eminently in more lectures than one. Your editor might add that he waved goodbye to the Nichol Smiths as they flew back to England. And certainly every one of their many friends in this country looks forward eagerly to their next visit.

W. Earl Britton writes of the film called *Bedlam*, concerned with madhouse reform, and based roughly upon Hogarth's *Rake's Progress*. It employs 18th century music for background, and includes Jack Wilkes and his famous reply to Lord Sandwich about the pox and the gallows. Britton also adds: "I recently heard a soap advertisement from a small station in Indiana which began, 'Pope said, "Whatever is right...etc."' The eighteenth century still lives, you see!"

At the meeting of the Bibliographical Society of America at the Grolier Club on June 13th, Fritz Liebert submitted a paper entitled "An Addition to the Bibliography of Samuel Johnson." We trust that it will soon appear in print.

Harper & Brothers has brought out an inexpensive edition of Elton Trueblood's little collection of *Dr. Johnson's Prayers*. In special gift format, this will be a welcome addition to every Johnsonian's library.

Johnson's Part in the Harleian Catalogue

Bill Wimsatt writes: "Which if any of the French, Latin, and English annotations in the first four volumes of the Harleian Catalogue were written by Johnson? We know that Johnson and Oldys labored on these volumes for Osborne during two or three of Johnson's early years in London, 1742, 1743, and perhaps the first weeks of 1744. Boswell says casually that Johnson wrote all the Latin notes. Hawkins is not sure "at what part of the catalogue Oldys's labours ended," and he cannot distinguish Johnson's notes from those of Oldys. So far as I am aware, nobody has made an attempt to analyze the internal evidence. The three lengthy English notes quoted as examples by Hawkins are, with the exception of a single phrase ("marginal eruptions of his memory and imagination"), written in a slovenly and even incorrect style that is scarcely Johnson's. May I call attention to a short note which not only in the accuracy and emphasis of its style but in its attitude toward naturalistic curiosity seems to me to bear the Johnsonian signature? Nos. 1704 and 1705 in vol. III (p. 139) are editions of the *Dissertatio de Generatione et Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* by the German female entomologist, Maria Sibilla Merian. The annotator has added:

This Lady gave a remarkable Proof of the Force of Curiosity, by undertaking a Voyage to Surinam, only to examine the Insects of that Country.

Coming upon this brief ironic opinion in the wilderness of the Harleian Catalogue, one will remember Johnson the essayist, who tells of Ranger among the virtuosos in *Idler* 64 and writes the letter of the collector Quisquilius in *Rambler* 82 and the comment upon it in *Rambler* 83. "To have rambled in search of shells and flowers, had but ill suited with the capacity of Newton. In 1773 Johnson was talking down Hawkesworth's edition of *Voyages to the South Sea*. "Why, Sir, as to insects, Ray reckons of British insects twenty thousand species. They might have staid at home and discovered enough in that way." (*Life*, II, 247-8)

The Gough Square House

Earlier this year L. F. Powell wrote to us:

"I called at Johnson House, Gough Square, and Mrs. Rowell showed

me over. This was the first time I had seen it since it was bombed. It presents a very different aspect from when I saw it last; then it was spick-and-span, the bookcases filled with books, pictures on the walls, and the rooms gay with flowers; now the walls are bare, the bookcases empty, the floor-boards up (to avert dry-rot). Permits for its repair and restoration have been granted and the work is to begin at once. The famous attic will need an entirely new roof.... I think it possible that the House will be open to the public by the summer."

Now word comes from Lord Harmsworth of a gift from The Pilgrim Trust of a large fund to be used towards the cost of repairs, over and above war damage compensation. Thus Dr. Johnson's House will soon be in better condition than ever.

Indelicacy of Authors

Buchanan Charles (new address: North Andover, Mass.) sends in another excerpt from the *New York Mirror*, that "weekly journal devoted to literature and the fine arts," for Nov. 7, 1835. Under the title above, and written by "The Last of the Cocked Hats," we have:

"Down to the present period, many of the finest literary works have not been free from gross indelicacy. One would suppose that authors, a class of men among whom mental cultivation is a principal employment, would have escaped this error, but, from the classick writers, and Shakspeare, and Chaucer, to Swift, Sterne, Fielding and Smollet, Pope, Byron, and Moore, the same charge is applicable. Even the modest and moral Addison has pages not to be read aloud.... Even Gibbon, himself, the historian of an age peculiarly enlightened and refined, has several pages which truth did not demand, but which propriety forbade.

Of all nations...the praise of intuitive delicacy is most due to the Americans. Like every virtue it is susceptible of ridicule, and the hardened vulgarity of Mrs. Trollope saw in it only food for laughter and the materials of a caricature.... But one, of a higher mind than this clever English shopkeeper, would have discovered in it a most graceful feature of the national character.... An American lady in Europe is often surprised, if not shocked, by a hardy freedom of dress and

conversation. Subjects which in her own country, are confined at least to separate circles of either sex,...are introduced in European circles with bold familiarity.... This latitude of speech has plenty of defenders, even among the sensible and virtuous, who declare that purity consists in thought and action, and not in words, with other similar and unmeaning truisms. We may be reminded, too, by the mistaken champions of verbal indelicacy, of a remark by Johnson, upon a lady who chose to withdraw from a circle where she deemed the debaters had overstepped propriety. "That woman," said the doctor, "is the most immodest one of the company"; and, of the millions who read the anecdote, nearly all, without examination, acquiesce in its justice. Now we profess reverence for the genius and virtue of the giant essayist, but we think that same observation very false and likely to do much harm. In the first place, Johnson's feelings of delicacy were not a proper standard by which to estimate those of a modest young girl, who, though perhaps less erudite and eloquent than her immortal abuser, might have been intuitively a better judge of the proprieties of her own personal conduct. His overbearing dogmaticalness and irritability, merit the rebuke and dissent of posterity, and we commend the lady as an example. The encroachments of the rude are owing to the passive submission of the tolerant. Whoever might have been the individual who, in the presence of the Rambler, forgot the respect due to women, we will venture to say that, although he might have been encouraged to repeat the offence, and even to enlarge it before the doctor and the rest of the company, he would more carefully rein his tongue before her who alone had felt and resented his boldness....

"We do not hesitate to award the palm of modesty to the American ladies, and, generally speaking, to American literature...."

To which the editors of the *Mirror*, at that time George P. Morris, Theodore S. Fay, and Nathaniel P. Willis, added the comment: "We cordially concur in the above, and hope the time will never arrive when the severe and rigid code so inflexibly demanded by our national taste shall be abrogated."

A Reminder

Do not forget to send in lists of 18th century newspapers available in American libraries.

